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SUBJECT: NEW UAE NGO SEEKS TO CONFRONT ROOT CAUSES OF TERRORISM,
OPEN TO COOPERATION WITH USG

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: Embassy officers met March 12 with Saif Bin Helal Al Shehhi, Founder and CEO of a new international humanitarian NGO based in Dubai, "Peace Without Limits (PWL)." PWL is inspired by a desire to reduce terrorism and extremism by addressing the root causes of discontent in the region. PWL has already lined up some impressive backers, including the Crown Prince of the Emirate of Fujairah, and has made strides towards the creation of its own satellite TV channel. While PWL's achievements to date are unclear, and we as yet cannot assess its credibility or viability, it appears to have begun some initial projects in Jordan, Yemen, Darfur, Pakistan and Afghanistan looking at madrasah curriculum reform, electronic literacy, interfaith dialogue, domestic violence and women and children's education. Given the breadth of its vision and plans, PWL is looking for international input and guidance. Al Shehhi made it clear that his organization is open to partnerships with the USG to generate projects and attract international expertise. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On March 12, representatives of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Regional Office and Embassy Public Affairs Section (PAS) met with Saif Bin Helal Al Shehhi, Founder and CEO of a new international NGO, based in Dubai, Peace Without Limits (PWL). PWL is the English translation of the name of the organization, called Salam Bila Hudoud in Arabic. PWL's literature is printed in five languages: Arabic, English, French, Pashto, and - surprisingly - Hebrew. The languages reflect the areas in which they operate, which are the Middle East/North Africa (including Sudan), Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Initial projects are operating in Darfur, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Jordan and Yemen. Al Shehhi is a 36-year old Emirati from the northern emirate of Ras al-Khaimah. A former police officer out of the Dubai Police Academy (Note. In the UAE, an Emirati police officer is a prestigious and well-paid position. End note.), Al Shehhi used his personal and family wealth and connections to put his ideas on counter radicalization into practice.

¶3. (SBU) Al Shehhi told Emboffs that he founded PWL to address "political and religious fanaticism" in the Islamic world in order to "get to the sources of terrorism" and to stress that the three Abrahamic religions (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism) have "nothing to do with violence." PWL is based in Dubai, and is funded by Al-Shehhi and the Crown Prince of the Emirate of Fujairah, Mohamed bin Hamad al-Sharqi. The organization is three months old. Given that the UAE has very restrictive laws for registering as a not-for-profit organization, the speed with which Al-Shehhi's project has gotten off the ground indicates support within the UAEG.

Indeed, Al-Shehhi says he has UAEG backing to apply to become a "UN recognized organization," though this process will take a considerable amount of time.

¶4. (SBU) Thematically, PWL's main focus is currently on curriculum reform in Islamic madrasahs (religious schools). Crucial to the success of this reform is teacher training and electronic literacy. PWL is already working with the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan to provide qualified moderate instructors for the madrasahs there.

Al-Shehhi said that PWL's programs are based in part on Saudi Arabia's experience rehabilitating terrorists and that PWL is working with the Saudi government in this field. The focus now is on radical madrasahs in Afghanistan, Sudan (in particular Darfur), Jordan, and Yemen. Regarding the work in Sudan, Al-Shehhi said that the Sudanese government asked PWL to come to Sudan as the "face of NGOs" as hostility to Western NGOs has increased there.

¶15. (SBU) In an attempt to improve the status of women, PWL is developing programs to combat violence against women and children. It also provides scholarships for women in the Middle East to study political science, specifically in the areas of democracy and human rights.

¶16. (SBU) In the area of interfaith dialogue, PWL is interested in reducing religious fanaticism and promoting mutual understanding and dialogue among faiths through international conferences. PWL supports the recent interfaith efforts of Saudi King Abdullah and is cooperating with the UAE's Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation on an upcoming interfaith conference in Jordan in May. Al-Shehhi said the Pope is expected to attend this conference.

¶17. (SBU) Much of PWL's work in the last three months has been spent preparing to launch a satellite TV channel. PWL purchased a frequency and equipment from a defunct real estate channel in Dubai, and Al-Shehhi estimates that the TV program is "70%" complete. The channel will broadcast programming in, or subtitled in, the five languages mentioned above. Programming will generally support the themes outlined, as well as the peace initiative of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia.

¶18. (SBU) MEPI and PAS officers described the MEPI Local Grants Program and other U.S. Department of State grant and exchange programs. We consider Al-Shehhi a strong nominee for an IVLP program. While PWL does not seem to need the money a grant

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provides, Al-Shehhi made it clear that he is interested in partnering, as MEPI could bring new ideas for projects and connections with networks of skilled and experienced implementers. Given the access PWL seems to enjoy, it would be worth exploring such partnerships.

¶19. (SBU) Comment: As this was an introductory meeting, it is hard to accurately assess PWL's credibility and long-term viability. We know PWL has an office in Dubai but do not know how many staff they have, although we have heard they are recruiting. Resources do not appear to be an issue as PWL recently held a well-attended (including by Embassy LES) launch reception at the luxury Emirates Palace Hotel. Our understanding is that Al-Shehhi is putting much of his own money into the project. One point to note is that the Ambassadors of Jordan and Afghanistan to the UAE attended PWL's launch reception and gave supportive remarks, implying that PWL has the buy-in to work in those countries. Mission UAE and the MEPI Regional Office will continue to monitor developments and explore opportunities for collaboration. End comment.

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